THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) The Foreign Minister of Qatar His Excellency Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabor Al-Thani, is his speech at the plenary meeting of the Organisation of the Islmaic Conference Foreign Ministers held in Khartum from June 25-27, 2002 proposed admission of India into Organization of the Islamic Conference as observer in the first instance to be followed by full membership of the organization at a later date. It has been reported that the Qatari Foreign Minister made this proposal in the context of a vision of the Organization's relations with non-member states which have farge Muslim communities, and the need to promote understanding and civilizational dialogue among cultures as a new approach to bring about security and stability. However, as per the available reports. Qatar subsequently withdrew the proposal.

(c) We see it as a recognition of the fact that the second largest Muslim community in the world lives in India. While we have excellent bilateral relations with most member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. India is not a member of the Organization and has not considered applying for it.

Continuation of Department of Posts

†*165. SHRI RAMA SHANKER KAUSHIK: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) what are the reasons for withdrawing the concession available to newspapers and magazines under the Indian Post Office Act instead of making use of the provisions of article 4 of the same Act; and

(b) what steps are being taken by Government to protect the honour and existence of the Department of Posts and Telegraph and increasing the sale of tickets?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICAITONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): (a) and (b) Newspapers and magazines continue to be transmitted by post at the tariff prescribed. As there is no provision for concession in these items, there is no question of withdrawing concession. Moreover, provisions of Section 4 of the Indian

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

Post Office Act, 1898 confer exclusive privilege on the Central government for conveyance of 'letters' which do not include newspapers and magazines.

The Department of Posts (erstwhile Department of Posts & Telegraph) has taken a number of steps, for betterment of services by diversifying its activities and also inducting new technology in its operations which, *inter-alia,* include:

1. New products in the area of business development, financial services, e-based services etc.

2: Introduction of computer based technology and internet applications.

3. Quality of service improvements.

The charges for transmission of a postal article are levied either in the form of a postage stamp or prepayment of postage in cash. The revenue from sale of postage stamp was Rs. 927.56 crores during 1999-2000 which declined to Rs. 852.87 crores in 2001 -2002. During the same period, postage realised in cash increased from Rs. 651.87 crores to Rs. 828.65 crores. Therefore, the revenue earned through postage comprising sale of postage stamp and prepayment of postage in cash has increased from Rs. 1579.43 crores in 1999-2000 to Rs. 1681.52 crores tn 2001-2002.

Bill for welfare of agricultural labour

*166. SHRI JIBON ROY: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Bill for welfare of agricultural labour is pending in his Ministry since long; and

(b) what is the present status of the Bill?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI SAHIB SINGH VERMA): (a) and <b) A proposal to enact a comprehensive legislation for the welfare of agricultural workers had been under consideration of the Govemment for a long time. However, due to lack of consensus amongst the States, the matter could not be processed further.